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Although Amhara often deny the religious aspect of their circumcision, it is recalled by the more learned that Jesus Christ was circumcised on the 6th day of the month Ter. Also, the confessor is invited to circumcisions, and blesses the baby, sprinkles the hut with blessed water, waves the cross about to exorcise lingering demons who have waited for the kill like vultures. He blesses the entire family; May God rear up the baby for you, that he be your support in old age, and carry you to your burial". He is rewarded with a small feast and as much barley beer as he can drink.

In some regions of Begemdir province girl babies undergo clitorotomy, performed without ceremony by the midwife, without any religious connotation. Usually the operation is a simple cut, a "clitorotomy". The purpose is to prepare the girl baby for future marital happiness by reducing the egotistical part of her sensuality. It is believed that Amhara women of the province of Gojjam, where clitorotomy is not practiced, are very difficult to satisfy sexually, that they are more concerned with their own sexual gratification than with that of their husbands', and even become unfaithful because of this. At least this is the belief of Amhara of Begemdir province. The term "washāla" is also used for an "uncircumcised" woman.

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It is considered a great calamity when twins are born. They are referred to as "ṁanta" (from "ṁanāta", undecided, not knowing which to accept). Everyone wonders "who will feed and carry the twin"? The proverb says:

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"The mother of twins,

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(because of what she carries) on her
back, she dies."

It would indeed be difficult for her to suckle two babies for two years, and to carry them on her back while fetching water and deadwood and doing all her other chores. Very likely, the weaker of twins is neglected, which greatly increases the higher natural mortality of twins. The observable fact is that one never seems to encounter adult Amhara twins.

C. Naming the Baby.

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Since Amhara fathers pay little attention to details concerning the unweaned baby, the task of naming the baby, giving it the "world name", usually falls to the mother. She does not usually prepare a name during pregnancy. Instead, she awaits the momentous event of birth, then decides on a name based on her predominant emotion at that time, or on a significant event occurring at the same time, or on the special wish she has for the personality or the future of her baby. All classes follow this practice, but among nobles there is an additional pattern of naming the baby after a deceased ancestor, particularly in the direct patrilineal line.

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Common "world names" given by mothers include:

Boys

"Tasmrat" - (lit. miracle), e.g. if the mother barely survived the parturition, or some other miraculous deliverance took place.

"Wallasä" - (lit. he returned), e.g. if the baby's father had been away, and the mother was overjoyed to see him return just at the time the baby was born.

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153 cultivating the spirit. If she is already pregnant, the sar may cause a miscarriage; either because he wants his human mate "pure", or to take revenge on the husband for miserly refusal of a chicken or young goat requested by the wife for the "sar" sacrifice - which may cause the sar to take the fetus as his "maqadasha" (lit. love gift).

When a male sar appears to a human female in a dream, he takes the form of a husband visiting his wife, if he is in a benevolent mood; if [33] angry, he takes the form of a black dog (though Ethiopian dogs are reddish) or of a snake. The actual possession, in this relationship is a magical coitus, expressed in the violently sensuous "gurri" dance. Some women possessed by a male sar drape their shamma (toga) in male fashion; some even put on ornaments of oldtime male warriors (lion mane, leopard skin), male jodphurs - all at the request of her male "sar", in which case she is actually "dressing" him.

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776 A woman who sleeps alone risks being struck by a male sar, and even neighbors sometimes admit having heard a "spirit visitor" at night. When a baby is born deformed, it is regarded as the result [845] of a magical coitus. Male sar spirits avoid menstruating women, [841] and during this period they may not sit on the skin of an animal that has been sacrificed to the sar. Male sar prefer to possess beautiful human females, and add to their beauty; so that some male [832] connoisseurs of female beauty claim that a woman's glowing charms leave her when her protective sar ("weqabi") leaves her. Therefore, there is some ambivalence in the hostility of human husbands to the possession of their wives by male sars; which may contribute to the frequency of such possession. For, at least, the neglected wife is then no longer ignored and may even become the center of attraction.

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- *565 many kinds: they may be male or female, Christian or Muslim, educated or unschooled, mischievous or somber. *Zār* are depicted as resembling the handsome, light-complexioned Abyssinians. They are not necessarily evil: sometimes a person is inspired by the sound of *sār* singing far off in the woods to add a new song to the local lore. But they are the great carriers of physical and mental illness. Many of the contagious diseases in Abyssinia, like typhus and smallpox, are referred to as "*sār* sicknesses." Above all, the *sār* is the bringer of seizures. When a *sār* lands on somebody's back the victim may go into a trance, succumb to melancholia, or break out in hysteria. Women are most often subjected to fits caused by *sār*—usually by male *sār*, who perform some kind of magical coitus with them and try to compete with their husbands.
- [845] When a freak is born to a woman, it is often attributed to the malicious effect of a *sār* jealous of her husband.

- *565 Though some kinds of *sār* only desist from molesting their victims through constant propitiations, others can be won over to serve as powerful protecting spirits. Thus an initial discomfort can be turned into a permanent advantage, offering the erstwhile victim magical protection and, as one student has suggested, affording women a temporary escape from their depressed social status through the companionship and opportunities for self-expression found in associations of *sār* "patients."

- *565 Human beings with supernatural powers are of two kinds: those who manipulate the spirits and practice magic, and those who are themselves possessed. The possessed are called *ṭayb* or *budā*. *Ṭayb* (or *ṭabib*) in its original sense means "manual worker," but it has acquired the connotation of "one with the evil eye," the primary meaning of *budā*. By looking at someone the *budā* or *ṭayb* "drinks his blood" through the magic power of his evil eye. The victim will first feel a severe headache and fatigue, then show hysterical frenzy, and finally intestinal cramps. His fingers will be clenched around his thumbs, a sign that the *budā* has grasped the thumbs and does not want anyone to see him taking his "food" from the victim. If the victim is not cured he will eventually waste away and die.

- *565 The *budā* is helpless to check his malevolent power, and if he enters the home of a friend who is not a *budā* he will shout ahead to get the children out of the way for fear he might unwittingly infect them. People who eat pork are thought invulnerable against the evil eye, the pork in their systems serving as a kind of antibody against the infection. Potters and metalsmiths have been kept in a low caste position in Abyssinia partly because of the belief that such artisans inherit this evil power along with their craft from their parents. It is important in selecting a spouse for one's child to make sure that there is no *budā* blood in the family, and to be called a *budā* or *ṭayb* is one of the more serious insults.

The Amhara peasant has many beliefs about the malevolent beings in his

844 woman's kinswomen who hold her down, the midwife repeatedly massages the woman's abdomen until the baby has emerged. The umbilical cord is knotted close to the baby and again near the mother, and then severed in the middle. The midwife then squeezes the woman's abdomen to eject the afterbirth, inserts her hand up the vagina to extract any remaining portion, and then passes the organ to an assistant who takes it outside for burial. The midwife then turns to the infant, washes it and carefully "shapes" its eyes, nose, and head into desirable conformations. Finally, the mother's body is washed.

* 759 The midwife's therapy is conspicuously lacking
844 in the secret and magical elements characteristic of herbalist therapies. It is, in addition, the only Amhara medical specialty which can be acquired without formal tutelage, by observing and assisting established midwives in delivering infants.

843 Pregnancy and childbirth are considered dangerous
844 experiences. Gerifta is a special threat: Nakedness
[821] under the sun may cause the fetus to turn in the womb and threaten breach birth, and urinating in the sun can
• [845] induce premature labor. Childbirth is sometimes the setting for divine punishment by means of breach birth.
[776] The pregnant woman is also a favorite victim of ganels, typically, she experiences great hemorrhaging, severe